

EARLY DOMESTIC BUILDINGS.*

By the restorers of ancient architecture, chimney shafts, though necessary, were considered to be excrescences on the design. In edifices designed in forms derived from temples, theatres, and other ancient buildings, with their parapets and roofs decorated with vases, statues, and pediments, the introduction of chimney shafts destroyed, in the eye of taste, the antique impress attempted to be given to the composition. A shaft rising from the apex of a pediment, or from the cornice of a façade, or coping of its parapet, would have been an eye-sore like a cocked hat placed on the Apollo Belvidere. To avoid the necessity for this barbarous combination, the Italian architects formed the hearth recess in the internal walls, and by this disposition, brought the chimney shafts into a situation where, if they could not be hidden, they could be grouped and disguised to have the appearance of something they were not, and be thus made to harmonize better with the general character of the building. It was rarely that the hearth recess was made in an external end wall, and then it was seldom indicated by any projection. The chimney shaft was placed on the parapet as a base, or appeared to rise from a plinth or pedestal placed on the cornice or roof. At this period, when the Italians were raising palaces and villas unequalled for their beauty, the English architects, whose eye had been educated amid combinations seen in buildings of the pointed style, practised a manner of design most extraordinary in its display of magnificence in plan, and Vandalism in the taste and application of decoration. Immense windows and an absurd exuberance of frittered and pedantic ornament, made their edifices appear better adapted for aviaries, than protection from a cold humid variable climate like that of England.† In such houses, Lord Bacon said, one did not know where to be out of the sun; and maugre their great fire-places, and blazing logs, he might with equal truth have added, nor where, in winter, to be out of the cold unless one stood within the chimney. In buildings erected, from the Conquest to the close of the reign of Henry VIII., the rule appears to have been to make the hearth recess in the outer wall, and between the windows.

When three or four hearths were thought sufficient in a large mansion, their position and form were of minor importance; but when, in the progress of improvement, a chimney had to be constructed in each of a number of apartments, they became objects of much consequence, both in the interior and in the aspect of the building. The chimney stacks were arranged in two ways on the exterior, one by attaching them like towers to the walls, as at Blithfield and Costessy, the other by resting them on the parapet, as at Thornbury. The first, though not the most frequently practised, is the most ornamental. It is difficult to say which is the most ancient. Single chimneys of the upper floors often rose like a column attached to the walls, supported by a corbel. The form given to the shafts was the same, whether they rested on a projection or on a parapet; sometimes they were carried up from the parapet like separate columns, in imitation of Venetian chimneys—or they were united at top by a cornice—or appeared like a group of pillars attached to each other. A third manner was practised when architects, in the reign of Elizabeth, discarded the ancient rule, and in imitation of the Italian practice, placed the hearth recess in the inner wall, and opposite, instead of between, the windows. The shafts were then sometimes made to assume the appearance of a parapet, ornamented in different ways, rising above the roof; but their shafts ceased to be so ornamental to the building as the earlier fashion. The chimney-piece, however, in its turn became an object on which much architectural decoration was

at; and that, from the nature of the climate, and habits and wants of the inhabitants, fire-places in rooms were essential to enjoyment and comfort, they were not ashamed, like the "artists" who succeeded them, to let the chimney shafts appear in their designs, but, on the contrary, by ornament and position, they brought them forward as essential parts of the fabric, and pleasing and picturesque objects in the composition. This was in truth the period of the triumph and glory of the chimney shaft. Invention was racked for variety of form, and novelty and elegance of decoration; Doric, Corinthian, composite, and other sorts of columns, fluted, twisted, square, polygonal, and elliptical; single, clustered, and in groups; crowned with pediments, scrolls, and vases; obelisks, altars, vases, all covered with roses, lozenges, frets, guilloches, festoons, armorial bearings, heads of monsters, initials, figures, and a host of other devices, combined with a most fantastic and capricious imagination, gave a superlative lightness, and grace, to the parapets and roofs of Tudor houses.

With the exception of regal and baronial mansions, the greater part of the houses throughout England were mostly one story high; except in towns, a two storied habitation was a mark of distinction, and were constructed of timber, but in parts of the west country, they were built of stone, and some few houses in London were of brick. This partiality for wood was, however, as much from taste as economy, for Hollinshed says, they might have been built at nearly the same expense of one material as the other. In the woody districts, fabrics were strong, and so well timbered as not to have more than six or nine inches between stud and stud. But in tracts, such as the fens, where wood was scarce, no studs were used, but only "raysins, groundells, transoms, and upright principalls, with here and there an overthwart post in the walles, whereunto they fasten their splintes and radles, and then cast it all over with clay to keepe out the winde," or strike them over with a rough plaster, which was afterwards whitened, and ornamented with a fine mortar, often beautified with figures and other curious devices. In other cases, instead of clay, bricks were used to fill in the spaces between the timbers; and instead of being plastered over, they were laid so as to form zig-zag, lozenge, and other simple patterns on the face of the wall. This was a very common method in Kent and Essex. They had large porches before their entrance doors, and generally one large hall, or parlour, or kitchen, the other rooms were comparatively small. Town houses, more pleasing to the painter's eye than comfortable for habitation, were built with one story jutting over the other, so that when the streets were narrow, the people in the upper stories on opposite sides of the street might not only converse with each other, but shake hands if so minded. The fashion was carried to an absurd excess; Ray saw an old house at York, of which the upper story projected fifteen feet beyond the foundation.‡ In towns, more especially in London, where the houses were generally three or four stories high, they were full of rooms with low ceilings, built at random, without any thing of contrivance, having steps from one to another, and blind staircases. Although their fronts were nearly composed of glass, with the windows projecting, the apartments were dark, as if the inhabitants were afraid of light and good air, and loved to play at hide and seek.

The pompous mansions of the Tudor period are deplorably deficient of all that comfort and convenience arising from a plan suitable to the wants and habits of an improved state of society. The whole interior was sacrificed for a certain display in a small portion of it. In a mansion consisting of eighty apartments, as at Leekinfild, four or five rooms only, says Bishop Percy, were adapted for the use of the noble owners and their guests, the rest were cheerless cabins to sleep in, coarsely plastered and white-washed, with ill-fitted doors and imperfect glazing, or they were appropriated for offices.§ In houses of this class, the presence or privy chamber, my lady's chamber or bower, and two or three bed-rooms, form the list of what would now be called, from their finishings and furniture, habitable apartments.

In the presence chamber the walls were hung to a part of their height with tapestry; or they were lined with panelled wainscot, ornamented with a profusion of carved ornaments, that often also covered the ceilings, or with stamped leather having gold devices on coloured grounds, that came into fashion in the time of Henry VIII. The doors were clumsy, and still coarsely hinged and fastened. It had shutters secured by rough bolts and padlocks.

These evils were tolerated from habit, not from ignorance, for the public was familiar with the most judicious precepts for the preservation of health, and the construction of buildings. 'For health's sake,' says Lucar, one of the neglected monitors, 'let the principal doors and windows of your house be open to the north-east, south-east, south-west. Moreover, make all the rooms within your house lightsome, of a convenient height, and of a laudable largeness. Build in every chamber within your house a chimney. Lodge always in a high chamber, that is severed from the roof with a floor between, rather than in a room below, and beware you do not sleep at any time in a close place nor upon the ground. And in no wise suffer a stable, ox stall, standing pool, filthy ditch, or stinking sink, to be neare your house or garden.'

Sash windows, that were introduced about the time of the great fire, were very common. The upper valve was fixed, and the under one, when raised, was kept at various heights by means of a series of notches and a catch to hook into them. The next improvement, introduced with King William, is considered to be a Dutch invention. In this the under sash was suspended by a weight and line, and moved over a pulley. The wood-work of these sashes was very massive and clumsy, and, from the thickness and width of the astragal, a large window had much the appearance of a portcullis filled with glass, of a very indifferent quality. The sill of the window frame was most imperfect. Shutters were common, and corresponded in clumsiness with the sashes. They had not yet, however, become necessities in bed-rooms, except in the best chambers of great houses. Rebated doors were also another contribution to comfort at the Revolution; and carpenters now began to tongue and groove the flooring boards, which prevented persons in the chamber overhead seeing what was going on in the room under, where the ceilings were not plastered. Tongueing and grooving boarded partitions was another clever innovation which shut up a multitude of holes, that made as many crevice winds as there were deals used. When I compare, says Neve, the modern way of building with the old way, I cannot but wonder at the genius of old times. Nothing is, or can be, more delightful and convenient than height, and nothing more agreeable to health than free air; and yet one would think the people of former ages were afraid of good air and light, whereas the genius of our times is altogether for light staircases, fine sash windows, and lofty ceilings. And such has been of late our builders' industry, in point of compactness and uniformity, that a house after the new way will afford on the same quantity of ground many more conveniences. The contrivance of closets in most rooms, and painted wainscot, now so much used, are also two great improvements, the one for convenience, the other for cleanliness and health; and indeed for so damp a country as England nothing could be better contrived than wainscot to keep off the ill impression of damp walls. In short, for handsome accommodation and neatness of lodging, London has undoubtedly got the pre-eminence. The greatest objection to its buildings, mostly of brick, is their slightness, occasioned by the fines exacted by the landlords, so that few of the common houses are built to last longer than the ground lease, which runs from fifty to sixty years. In the meantime, however, if there happens to be a fit of excessive heat or cold, the tenant must needs be uneasy at it. The plastered ceilings also, so much used in England beyond other countries, make, by their whiteness, the rooms much lighter, and are excellent against raging fires; they stop the passage of the dust, lessen the noise overhead, and in summer time the air of a room is something the cooler for them, and in the winter something the warmer, because it

* See p. 413, *ante*. Notes from Perrau's "History of Warming and Ventilating."

† *Chapel's Views of Tudor Houses*, and *Briston's Arch. Antiquities*.

‡ Buckler, *Historical Account of Eltham Palace*, p. 19.

§ *Itinerary*, p. 166.

† *Neve, City and Country Purchaser, Art. Building.*

‡ *Strutt, Morda. vol. iii. p. 101.*

* *Lucar Solace*, p. 152.